THE REDBIRD WORD

Volume 100 Issue 6 Celebrating 100 years!

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ABOUT THE COVER

Sophomores Jane Ozark and Kaylee Chinchilla run through drills during tryouts at Piasa Motor Fuels Field on March 5, 2026.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

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LEADERS RISE

Freshmen gather outside during the Link Crew hot dog cookout to meet new friends and celebrate the start of the school year. *Photo by Kyridas Orr, Sports Editor*

Link Crew Looks For New Leaders as The Year Comes to an End

By *Kyridas Orr, Sports Editor*

Walking in on the first day of high school can be different for everyone. Some can be overwhelmed by the size of the school or some may be nervous about taking high school courses.

Fortunately, for all freshmen at Alton High, there is an organization called Link Crew. Link Crew is a group of upperclassmen leaders who take freshmen under their wings and guide them through their first year of high school, building bonds and connections to create a safe space for them.

"Having a supportive, older student for freshmen helps students hear firsthand the 'dos and don'ts' of high school," Link Crew Coordinator Tatiana Adams said.

The program typically begins before the start of school with training days for the juniors and seniors.

"During training days, we [coordinators] simulate what we expect mentors to do with their freshmen," Adams said. "We prepare our leaders to lead with confidence. We participate in activities that are fun and break down barriers to get to know one another, just like we expect our leaders to do with their freshmen."

After the training days, Link Crew hosts a freshmen welcome day. Leaders meet their group of freshmen, leading them on campus tours, playing icebreakers and answering questions that aren't commonly asked.

Also they give advice on which stairwell to take, how to manage your time properly, and which teachers are the strictest on tardies.

Junior Griffin Clark is a first-year leader for Link Crew.

"Orientation day was nice," Clark said. "I got to be with my friends who are also leaders, and I got to meet my freshmen for the school year."

Link Crew doesn't just end after the first week of school. Throughout the school year, leaders check in with their assigned freshmen during advisory. During these check-ins, leaders talk about how school is going, offering help and guidance.

Also, leaders will lead fun activities with their class that always have a hidden message behind them. Many games and activities have to do with teamwork, overcoming challenges and being more open-minded to new things.

By pairing younger students with experienced peers, Link Crew aims to build connections early and close the gap between grades.

"Link Crew provides a model of appropriate and positive student relationship building," Adams said.

As for the upperclassmen, the benefits are just as useful.

"Being a Link Crew leader is great," Clark said. "Being able to be a mentor for my freshmen makes me happy."

As the school year comes to an end, the seniors will graduate, opening new positions for incoming juniors and seniors to apply to be a Redbird Link Leader.

Applications for the 26-27 school year are due March 24. Students should check their email or contact a Link Crew Coordinator for more information.

LUNCH LETDOWN

Food Court Friday Disappears After New Procedures Implemented

By Raye Holmes, Social Media Manager

Food Court Friday used to be a fun-filled day for all students and staff at Alton High where they could shop for food like Chic-Fil-A sandwiches, Dairy Queen Blizzards and more provided by various clubs and organizations.

Last semester, there was a sudden disappearance of this special day. This follows the various changes in Food Court Friday procedures that were made over the last two years by administration.

"They [bookkeeper and finance department] did an online ordering form so that it would be more equitable so every student could get a chance to order," Principal Stacie Franke said. "They brought in the concept of using debit cards and credit cards [instead of cash]."

The disappearance of Food Court Friday wasn't because administrators wanted to get rid of it completely. The issue also lies with all parties not being satisfied.

"I love that students had that opportunity, but there were several things that probably weren't being done by school policy that we needed to address," Franke said. "It also wasn't very equitable based on, ...what lunch period you were in. You were either able to get Food Court Friday food or it was already sold out."

There are students that have expressed disappointment with the changes in payment methods and online ordering.

"I don't agree with the online payments because a large group of students do not have that option," junior Cayden Gauntt said. "It completely takes away the fun of 'shopping' with your friends and makes it more formal than needed."

Along with the changes put in place for the payment system, another issue is club sponsors turning down the opportunity to participate every month.

"Clubs stopped participating in Food Court Friday largely due to the amount of time, planning and supervision required compared to the profit earned," assistant principal Nicole Walker said. "Sponsor feedback from surveys indicated that while the event is positive for students, the workload of organizing supplies, coordinating students and managing sales often outweighs the financial benefit to their organization."

In the future, there are plans for a new and improved way to carry out the event. Though there is not a definitive answer from administration yet as they continue to discuss new possibilities.

"I'm hopeful that with Walker getting some input from club sponsors and from students that maybe we can develop a different process," Franke said.

Sophomore Charlotte Callahan interacts with fellow classmates during A lunch.
Photo by Lily Waltz, Features Editor

Senior Hailey Smith prepares for Senior Assassin by purchasing goggles.
Photo by Lily Waltz, Features Editor

Senior Assassin Marks its Second Year at Alton High

By Lily Waltz, Features Editor

In a game played by high schools all around America, seniors can be seen targeting fellow students by splashing them with water guns, catching them through social media or hiding themselves from their "attacker." This second-year tradition at Alton High, called senior assassin, serves as an opportunity for the senior class to interact and enjoy the last months of high school.

While the game is not affiliated with the school, there have been a few guidelines set by administration to ensure a smooth and sensible execution for all players involved. CTE teacher Brian Bergin bridged the communication between admin and students for these rules.

"I think they [administration] appreciated the fact that students were putting in some safety guidelines," Bergin said. "It was also suggested that students meet with the SROs before students start the game to ensure there aren't any problems in the community."

The game began on March 11 at 3:15 p.m. and seniors were off at the races to splash their opponents designated by the app Splashin'. To play, each student was required to pay $8, in which 80% of the cash pot will go towards the last person standing and the remaining 20% to the second-to-last standing.

"The money is definitely a bonus, but it just seems like a lot of fun," senior Kenzie Stark said. "The seniors had a really good time with it last year and a lot of other schools participated in it as well."

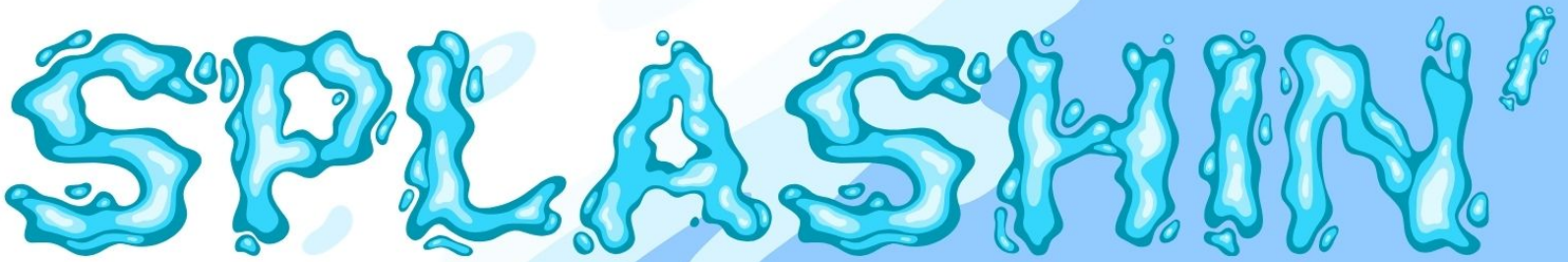
Once the player is splashed by their "attacker," they are out of the game. For many, planning several different tactics to catch their opponent is what will hopefully boost their chances in the game.

"I think my main focus is to just catch people off guard and surprise them," Stark said.

Not only is senior assassin an opportunity for seniors to take part in the game, but it is also one of the few senior events that the class of 2026 will get to experience with each other. Having these opportunities gives seniors the chance to make lasting memories.

"I think anytime students can have a chance to have some fun and create some memories, it's important," Bergin said.

Senior assassin has already made way for the seniors with eliminations beginning this week. For any issues or concerns about the game, students can contact Leigha Cole, game administrator.



PLAN, PRACTICE, PERFORM

A Step-by-Step Guide to Smarter ACT Preparation

By Heaven Everage, Sports Editor

Preparing for the ACT can feel overwhelming for high school juniors balancing homework, extracurricular activities and jobs. At Alton High, however, students and counselors say careful preparation and the right strategies can make the test manageable.

Senior Eden Hough remembers feeling nervous before taking the ACT. Rather than letting that stress take over, she built a study plan centered on practice tests to better understand her strengths and weaknesses.

"I struggled most on the math section during practice and focused most of my time preparing on that and it really helped," Hough said.

By identifying her weakest subject, Hough focused her time more effectively. She said reviewing question patterns and practicing under timed conditions made a significant difference in her performance.

"The more confident you feel in your skills, the less stressful test day becomes," Hough said.

As her practice scores improved, so did her confidence. Hough said strong preparation not only reduced anxiety, but also expanded her opportunities after high school.

"My score made me a competitive applicant that really stood out to college admissions officers," Hough said. "I've also received merit scholarships which is really helpful."

Despite her success, Hough emphasized that standardized tests do not fully measure academic ability.

"I know so many smart, hard-working people who don't stand out due to their test scores," Hough said. "Not everyone is a good test taker."

Her perspective highlights an important reminder for juniors. Preparation can improve results, but test scores are only one part of the college admissions process.

Assistant principal and director of school counseling Dr. Jordan Anderson said the ACT continues to play an important role for many students, particularly those pursuing specialized programs. Emily Lacy, data specialist counselor, agreed that scores can matter depending on a student's goals.

"It really depends on what you're wanting to do after high school and where you're wanting to start your education," Anderson said. "Some specialized programs may place more emphasis on ACT scores."

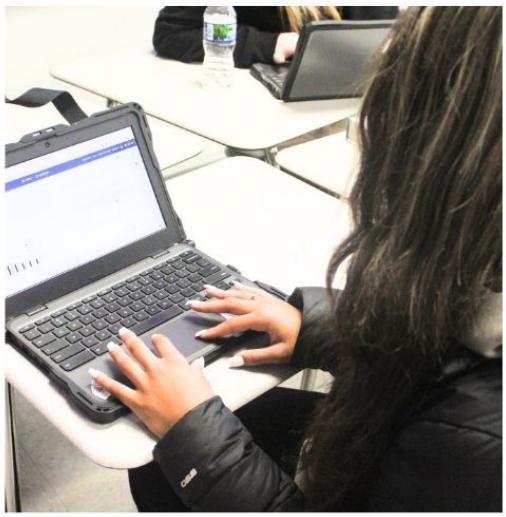
Students interested in competitive majors such as engineering or journalism may need higher scores to stand out. Because of this, Anderson encourages students to begin preparing early rather than waiting until junior year.

"Everything the ACT asks you to do builds on skills learned in freshman and sophomore year," Anderson said.

Starting early allows students to identify weak areas and create consistent study routines. Lacy said structured preparation tools can help reinforce foundational skills and build confidence over time.

"Understanding the pace you need, like reading one passage every two minutes or completing a math problem each minute, helps you feel more relaxed on test day," Lacy said.

Practicing under timed conditions helps students avoid panic and manage the pace of the exam.



Junior Armaya Lucas completes an ACT science practice test to prepare for the upcoming exam on March 24.
Photo by Heaven Everage, Sports Editor

However, counselors stress that preparation should be balanced with other responsibilities.

"You have homework, sports, jobs and other things," Anderson said. "Dedicating one focused hour a week to ACT prep can make a difference without taking over your life."

Maintaining that balance is essential to preventing burnout. Counselors also recommend getting enough sleep, eating a balanced breakfast and using relaxation techniques before the test.

"Get some sleep the night before," Lacy said. "Eat a well-balanced breakfast, you'll do fine."

Hough said structured preparation helped her stay calm.

"Seeing my practice scores improve made me feel ready," Hough said.

Using myACT.org, Progress Learning and advice from students and counselors, Alton High juniors can approach the ACT confidently.

Scholar Bowl Strives for Success

By Kolten Clore, Web Editor

TRIVIA TIME

As the team waits, suspense is in the air as the final question is read aloud. The buzzer rings, and Alton answers correctly.

Scholar Bowl is a team-based, 5v5 activity where a moderator asks questions to the teams. Question topics range from math, science, social studies, fine arts and a miscellaneous category that can range from sports to current events and politics. Teams have to answer the questions provided to receive points and the team with the most points by the end of a timed round wins.

"Our team is not super good compared to some of the other teams, but we have been improving," Varsity Scholar Bowl Captain Marcus Hoffmann said.

Since the season began, the team has had a rough time in its events.

In the past few years, Scholar Bowl has had great success having some notable accomplishments since 2023 such as winning the 2023 IHSA regional championship. Since many former Scholar Bowl members have graduated, the team is down experienced members and currently working to train new players.

"We're trying to rebuild from a few years ago when we were right at the top of our conference," Scholar Bowl Coach Dr. David Hurley said. "Now we're trying to get more people in, especially the freshmen and sophomores, and that way we can rise back up to where we were a few years ago."

Practices happen every Monday after school. Team members work on the skills they need to achieve success by answering previous questions.

Members of the Scholar Bowl team from left, Isabel Espinoza, Ginger Finger, Marcus Hoffmann, Brandon Rivers and Sofia Macropoulos compete against Roxana High School. Alton defeated Roxana, Bethalto and Marquette.
Photo by Kolten Clore, Web Editor

"I feel like we can improve on getting more people who know literature, fine arts and/or sports," junior Brandon Rivers said. "In history/geography, we excel."

Students interested in joining can contact the sponsor David Hurley in room B251 or at dhurley@altonschools.org.

WOMENS TRIVIA

Check the Daily Bird, under the entertainment tab, to find out the answers!

1. Who was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize?

A) Rosa Parks
B) Marie Curie
C) Florence Nightingale

2. Who was the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress in 1968?

A) Kamala Harris
B) Shirley Chisholm
C) Rosa Parks

3. Who was the first woman to fly in space?

A) Sally Ride
B) Valentina Tereshkova
C) Mae Jemison

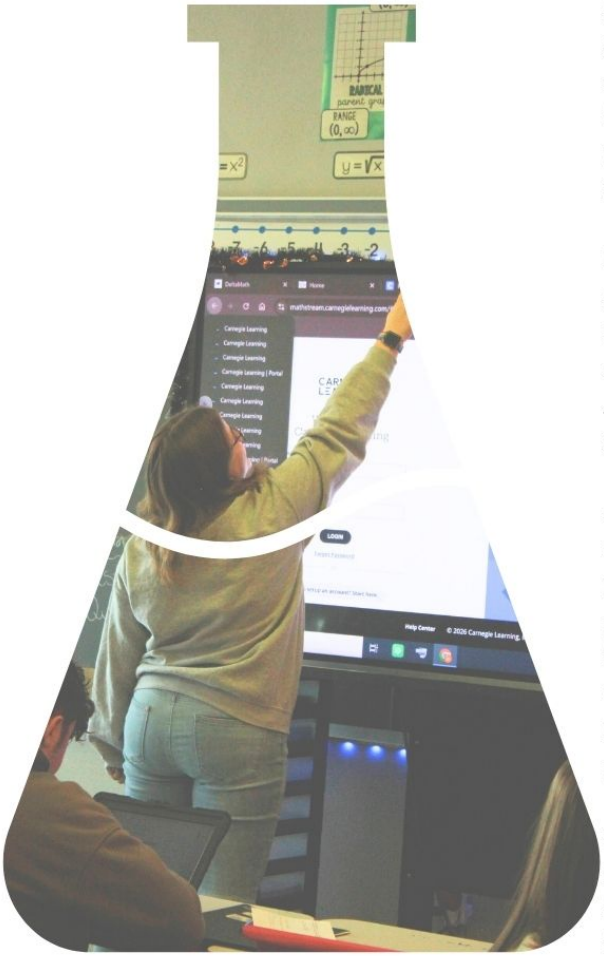
4. Who was the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States?

A) Elizabeth Blackwell
B) Clara Barton
C) Florence Nightingale

WOMEN IN

Alton High Women are Shaping the Future of STEM

By Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor



Algebra teacher Abigail Dial show students how to get their assignment.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

At Alton High School, female Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teachers are working to close the gender gap in science and math by mentoring the next generation of young women in the field.

According to the World Economic Forum, in 2024, only 28.2% of the STEM global workforce was made up of women. Even with a competitive field, algebra teacher Abigail Dial said she has always had a passion for math.

"It [math] feels like a puzzle," Dial said. "In high school, I took several coding and robotics classes, and those experiences really sparked my passion for STEM. I had a robotics teacher who played a huge role in encouraging me and recommending me for competitive stem summer programs."

Across the STEM field, there are still barriers in education. Dial said she experienced gender bias firsthand while in college. "I had a female professor who taught my C++ coding course," Dial said. "I noticed that even when my assignments were similar to those of male classmates, my grades were consistently lower. I scheduled a Zoom meeting with her to discuss the discrepancies in grading. During that meeting, she told me that she intentionally graded her female students more harshly. She believed that she was preparing us 'for the real world' and for how we would be treated throughout our careers. It was disappointing and eye-opening."

A 2021 study by the LEGO Group and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media found that young boys were more encouraged into STEM than young girls were. Dial, growing up, said she faced similar challenges.

"I know my brother grew up making baking soda volcanoes, getting microscopes for Christmas, and building Legos, where I dressed up Barbies, had a fake kitchen set, and got play makeup for many birthdays," Dial said. "Not that there is anything wrong with any of these toys, but it does set the precedent very early on about what society

Sophomore Sophia Santrock and junior Alyssa Watson-Duey work on their in-class assignment.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

believes we should be doing."

Biomedical science teacher Kelly Paige started out getting an animal science degree with an interest in veterinary school, but said she did not have a clear path on what she wanted to do.

"My grad school advisor suggested science teaching, and I did that for a year. Then I left and went into veterinary because I still wanted to do that," Paige said. "I spent 17 years as a licensed veterinary technician and found that I really did love training people and teaching pet owners so as I've gotten older, I decided to go back to teaching. I have been with Alton High School for three years now teaching biomedical sciences."

Paige said she began her career during a time where gender equality was not as progressive as it is now and wished she had the same advice she would give now.

"Try and pick something that can be applied to numerous areas so that you have a better chance of finding a job when you're done," Paige said. "Also, intern, volunteer and job shadow in the career you think you want to do NOW. It is just as important to find out you hate a job as it is to find out you love it. Lastly try and gain as many certifications as you can before you graduate. It will show future employers and colleges so many positive things about who you are as a person and a student."

Senior Eden Hough plans on going to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and going into a field of science.

"I took a lot of science extracurriculars that made me realize I loved working with animals," Hough said. "The hands-on experience made a big difference. My parents have supported me through everything and helped me to have the opportunity to pursue those things."

Efforts to address the gender gap in STEM continue through mentorship and classroom representation.

Teachers like Dial say providing encouragement and working through it can influence students' views on opportunities in science and math.

"It's important to remember that challenges are part of growth," Dial said. "STEM needs diverse perspectives and their [women in STEM] ideas and contributions truly matter."

Biomedical science teacher Kelly Paige answers questions from Junior Ella Peuterbaugh.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

Senior Makenzie Stark trys to get past junior Peyton Delehanty during a drill at tryouts.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

Girls' Soccer Kicks into Action

By Stella Cowan, Copy Editor

Spring sports have rolled back into season, and that means girls' soccer is in full swing. With a successful preseason behind them, and players full of excitement, the team is ready to get back onto the field.

Grace Massey, a captain of the varsity team, shared her thoughts about the upcoming season.

"I feel pretty good about the roster this year," Massey said. "We have more numbers to work with which is very beneficial to us."

The team has been preparing since January with their preseason consisting of basic fitness conditioning and ball skills.

"It is very important to start early and get in shape before the season rolls around," Massey said.

Preseason conditioned the girls for tryouts, which occurred March 2-4, and now the team will continue to hold regular practices to build strength. Practices include warm ups, passing drills, shooting drills and scrimmaging against each other.

Benjamin Cowan, the team's new assistant coach, is preparing to start his first year coaching for Alton High.

"For me, some of the best rewards of coaching come from being able to see the players develop and apply what they have learned to the games," Cowan said. "I'm excited to start coaching for Alton."

Cowan said he hopes to implement a possession-based attack style of soccer. This strategy is aimed at accomplishing the main objective for this season: winning games.

Massey said that her goals for this year include increasing teamwork and effective communication.

"I hope to put in more effort," Massey said. This, paired with the objective of a more positive outlook surrounding the team, bodes well for the upcoming season.

Alongside Head Coach Shayna Lacey, this will be the team's first year playing on the newly turfed Piasa Motor Fuels Field on the Alton High campus. The field was renovated in mid 2025, just in time for the fall sports season, but has yet to see a spring soccer game.

With a new field, a new assistant coach and several new players, the team's anticipation is bright. Massey is looking to finish out her last high school season strong.

"There are only two seniors this upcoming season, me and Kenzie [Stark]," Massey said. "I think it will be very special."

Their first games of the season will be part of the Metro Cup Tournament, occurring on March 16 at Columbia High School and March 18 and 21 at Althoff High School. Their first home game will be March 28 against Triad.

WHEN HISTORY HOOPS

Senior Guard Makes School History With 1,500 Point Career

By Jordan Womack, Reporter

Edited by Heaven Everage, Sports Editor

Alton High senior guard Semaj Stampley has made a huge impact on the varsity boys' basketball team since he transferred from Christian Brothers College High School his sophomore year. He has been one of the leading scorers, which has made a huge impact on Alton, causing them to win tons of big games. There is a lot of appreciation for the impact and bonds he has built since he came back to Alton High.

While playing the Vashon Wolverines during the O'Fallon Shootout tournament, Stampley accomplished what no other player on the boys' basketball team has ever done. During the fourth quarter, Stampley scored a 3-pointer that put him at 1,500 points, making him the all-time leading scorer, passing Kavon Lacey, who scored 1,499 points in 2007.

"It was a great moment in history, something that is rarely done and I felt good about it," Stampley said.

When Stampley broke the school record scoring 1,500 points, it wasn't just a number on a stats sheet; it was the sum of the time and dedication he put in on and off the court with teammates.

"We put in countless hours trying to get better and better so to see that it all paid off with this accomplishment shows a lot and how hard work truly pays off," varsity boys' basketball senior Tysean Jones said.

His words captured the collective pride of a team that pushed each other through grueling practices, film sessions, and off-season workouts. The milestone served as proof that their commitment to improvement wasn't in vain.

It wasn't just one player's achievement, but a reflection of a group that believed in trusting the process and that faith would bring historic results. From a coaches' perspective, the milestone didn't just show a great offensive production; it symbolized great leadership and consistency.

"Semaj has never chased the record; he chased improving, figuring out what he can do to make his teammates improve and being the same dude every day," head coach Dylan Dudley said.

Dudley built a bond with Stampley the second he came back to Alton. Stampley's coaches love his consistency and how he stays focused during high-pressure moments, such as when he was on the verge of breaking the school record. For the staff, watching him break the record was not just about celebrating history, but about seeing a player fully maximize his potential through dedication to the team and commitment to improvement.

Stampley breaking 1,500 points was history, but the amount of work and dedication behind the achievement is unforgettable.

Semaj Stampley anticipates a shot from a teammate to grab a rebound. *Photo by Garrett Stafford, Broadcast Editor*

READY, SET, GO

Track and Field Adjusts as the Seasons Change

By Victoria Strowmatt, Copy Editor

As the cold breeze comes to an end, the outdoor track and field season begins. In late January, the team began training indoors. Indoor track and field ends on March 28 when the team attends the Illinois Indoor Championships, marking the beginning of the outdoor season.

There is a subtle difference between the indoor and outdoor seasons. Most noticeably, the team will be able to run on different types of tracks. A typical indoor track is about 200 meters wide while outdoor tracks are about 400 meters wide. This size difference influences the curve of a field. Whenever a track is smaller, the curve is sharper, which sometimes puts a strain on the runner's legs.

"I definitely feel that there is a difference between outdoor and indoor because indoor flat tracks are very narrow," senior varsity boys' track and field athlete Marcus Caruthers said. "It kind of hurts to run indoors if you have to."

While some athletes, like senior Rayna Raglin, said she feels that indoor track is exciting.

"I'm excited about indoor championships because I will get to run on a bank track again," Raglin said.

A bank track is a type of indoor track field in which the curves are tilted upwards. The inclines are designed to help athletes maintain higher speeds on curves, reducing the strain on their legs. Changes in outdoor and indoor seasons influence athletes to participate year-round.

"We have a lot of young talent that needs to develop," Caruthers said.

It is estimated that there are about 50 boys enrolled in the outdoor track and field season for 2026. About 40% of the track and field team is part of the class of 2027. Together, the boys' and girls' outdoor track and field teams have about 100 students combined.

Participating in outdoor track and field encourages students to be more active during the spring.

Outdoor track and field season starts on April 3 and ends on May 30 where they will be competing at the IHSA State meet at Eastern Illinois University.

Senior Hank McClaine stretches while warming up for practice.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

Junior Lataveon Harley warms up during track and field practice.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

From left to right, freshmen Jha'nyla Harrison, Moriah Taylor, Serenity Penn and Ava Lott warm up as practice starts.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

Varsity Baseball Team Gears Up for 2026 Season

By Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

With the crack of a bat and the cheering of the crowd, the 2026 baseball season is coming to a start. As the team practices together, they find ways to work around issues before their first game.

To prepare for the tryouts, there were a variety of different optional practices open to the team. Junior Donavon Ducey and other teammates attended the practices to work on their skills.

"We have work outs, open gyms and hitting every week," Ducey said. "Usually on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays."

Players also had the opportunity to participate in summer programs to get a head start on training. Varsity baseball coach Scott Harper said these optional practices are crucial to their season.

"Many also take advantage of training with summer programs and area facilities," Harper said. "This time of year, physical conditioning in the weight room is most important during Athletic PE during the day or UFIT sessions after school."

In addition to baseball, players have to keep up with school and possible setbacks during the season. Ducey said it can be difficult to find a balance between the challenges of baseball and keeping up with school.

"Last season, we had a couple guys who faced injuries but are doing fine now," Ducey said. "Sometimes school work can also be hard to balance with baseball on top of that."

As the team practices, Harper said there are challenges that must be overcome. Harper said he makes an effort to address these concerns to the team as a whole.

"Baseball is a game of failures; trying to hit a round ball with a round bat square; just throw strikes – these are common sayings about the game that players face while trying to be successful," Harper said. "Injuries are also a part of sports that athletes must overcome. This is where the importance of the team concept comes in. Individual players can have a bad game, but the team can still come out on top."

Physical challenges are not the only type of challenges players face. Harper said the players overall have to work as a team and keep a positive attitude.

"Most of the guys in the program have played together throughout the years, so have developed friendship bonds outside of the season," Harper said. "Once we form the current year's team, we spend time talking about working together with common goals and doing some team building to help keep a positive vibe, even during tough times."

As the season kicks off, Harper said he hopes to see the team continuing to improve and have a good season. The varsity baseball team's first game is at Gordon Moore Park against Marquette Catholic High School on March 15 at 6 p.m.

"I'm always excited to officially start a season, getting a chance to work with the coaches and players each day to improve on skills and develop consistency for competing each game," Harper said. "As the season progresses, you hope to be prepared for the daily challenges and each opponent you go against, so that everyone feels good about time spent and makes some good memories of the season."

Junior Amari Raglin gets ready to field the ball.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

Junior Donavon Ducey warms up as practice starts.
Photo by Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

BATTER UP

A GETAWAY WEEKEND

OPINION: How to Celebrate Spring Break the Right Way

By Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

Spring break always seemed like the perfect pause from the second semester with a guaranteed trip somewhere far away. It's not that at all. Good Friday, Easter Monday and, shockingly, that same Tuesday are just as exciting as any other break. The true glory of these extra two days off doesn't have to be downplayed anymore. Together - we're going to learn the most awesome and amazing ways to spend spring break.

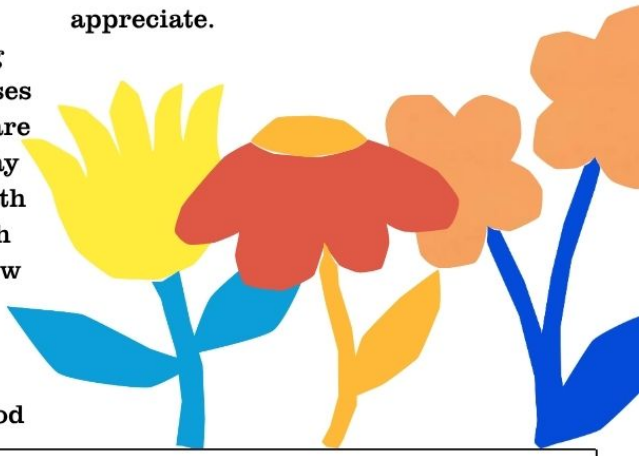
First of all, stop comparing! Alright, yes your friend from another school is in Cancun for the week. It's just for their feed, obviously. The best nights of real fun are always the bonfires, movie marathons or five hours of basketball in the church parking lot.

Do something unforgettable. There are some great road trips to be made in the local area that are typically looked past. Shawnee National Forest is just short of three hours from the high school and has a few amazing views to offer. The Lake of the Ozarks, Carlyle Lake and Fugitive Beach are decently common swimming locations to start your summer tan and watch the temperature get hotter. Even just a short camping trip at Pere Marquette State Park can be turned into an awesome weekend.

Another quick tip - unforgettable doesn't have to be pricey. Have your friends each bring over their favorite board game for you all to go through as a group. If you're committed enough, you can make a game of Monopoly run all weekend long. Visit some family that you haven't seen in a while. Getting some ice cream or going on a walk with that one friend that you haven't seen in a long time can go a long way.

There's also nothing wrong with just letting the weekend feel short. Rest is important, especially this late into second semester. Waking up on time is getting harder, classes are getting more difficult, finals are slowly but surely making their way to us and sometimes going out with friends can even feel like too much for some people. Taking a good few days to make sure you sleep in a little too long, stay up a little too late, rearrange your room and completely unplug is vital to a good reset. Even rereading one of your favorite books, or a book you've been wanting to get to, is a great way to just pause your mind wherever you are.

The truth about spring break is that there's not always much to it. It's about the moments we choose to take in and enjoy whether it be a road trip or a walk in the park with that old friend. Wherever you go, the end goal should stay the same in ensuring personal enjoyment and returning to school ready and refreshed. So don't measure spring break by the cost of an airplane ticket or how many pictures you can fit into one post; measure it by the people that you're with and the moments you choose to appreciate.



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EDITORIAL

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America Protects Criminals in Powerful Places

By Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

America is grounded almost entirely on the ideals of democracy and equality. Time and time again, our democracy has failed to show that "there are no kings in America." The law tends to brush aside those who are abundantly wealthy, powerful and connected.

Take Jeffrey Epstein - the country saw this powerful financier plead guilty for soliciting dozens of minors for prostitution, and continue to face 13 months in a Florida jail in which he was allowed to leave for 12 hours, six days a week. You would have seen any average man face a life sentence following his actions.

Attorney Alexander Acosta made this plea agreement, hiding the true extent of Epstein's criminal activity. This plea deal was later brushed off as "poor judgement," according to statements released by the Department of Justice. As much as Epstein was up to no good, his case is not the only example of this flaw in the justice system.

Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs faced multiple trials against allegations of sexual misconduct over the years, dating back 30 years worth of prostitution and rape claims. He has been accused of abusing and violating upwards of 120 people and is currently in prison with only two counts of transportation with the purpose of prostitution and a 50-month sentence. In 2023, singer Cassie Ventura filed a lawsuit against Combs, claiming years worth of abuse and rape.

The case was settled in just 24 hours in favor of Combs' innocence. Combs does not accept any criminal allegations. These patterns of leniency and quick decision raise reoccurring questions - if an average man were to face even remotely similar allegations, what would the outcome be?

Regardless of political affiliation, Donald Trump has quite a legal history of his own coming from before and during his time as president, that has caused citizens to question the accountability of powerful figures. New York courts found him guilty of 34 felony counts for altering business documents and hush-money payments to cover an extramarital affair with adult film actress, Stormy Daniels. Trump was then granted an "unconditional discharge," meaning the then presidential elect would be deemed a convicted felon but face no jail time, fines or probation.

A court transcription from PBS News explained that the Judge on the case, Judge Juan Merchan said, "that, if Donald Trump had been a regular citizen, a regular defendant, that he would have likely have faced much harsher punishment for those crimes." This is a direct example of Americans blatantly witnessing the power of office and wealth complicate justice. Merchan also described that case as, "a unique place in this Nation's history."

Even in these cases that we do see convictions - also seen with R. Kelly and Harvey Weinstein - the small amount of accountability taken only happens literally decades after initial allegations arise. By that time, victims are already traumatized and the justice system fails. All cases are different, some eerily similar, but different for the most part.

One thing is for certain: we almost never see accountability as long as money or connections can come quick enough. America doesn't crown a king, but consequences are seemingly less harsh when power buys it. Status creates a social class that lives under a different version of American law, removing the purpose of "no one is above the law."

If justice were to begin practicing equality, it cannot rely on a price tag, famous name or the risk of a headline. Support survivors, investigators and transparency in our courtrooms.

Women's History Month

A	E	W	C	S	O	S	L	I	I	R	R	N	M
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